

A TRIBUTE TO KEITH HOUSE, WJU #558

by WJU President John Wetzel, WJU #949

Here are some remembrances about long time Windjammer conductor and friend, the late Keith House.

Keith was an extraordinary musician and trumpeter/cornetist. Early in his career, after serving in WWII in Europe as a trumpet player, he became cornet soloist with the Unity Band of Kansas City. Keith had 11 solos memorized and he would rotate them from night to night. Later on, he became conductor of that band. Keith also played with the Kansas City Symphony and was director of the Kansas City American Legion Band. He would often recruit Central students and friends to play, including yours truly! With the American Legion, we attended many national conventions representing Missouri. Keith and I also played in a small band at Disneyworld in Florida for its 25th anniversary. He became conductor of the Columbia Community Band in the early 1990's and held that position until health forced him to quit in 2005.

Keith was an ordained Minister of Music in the Methodist Church, public school band director, and later, Director of Bands (1972) and Dean of Music of the Swinney Conservatory of Music (1984) at Central Methodist College in Fayette, a small liberal arts college in the middle of Missouri. At Central, Keith gained the reputation of having the best small college band in America. Keith was a lover of marches and circus music and a good friend of Merle Evans. He was instrumental in getting Central Methodist College to bestow an honorary Doctoral degree on Merle. Keith received many accolades including membership in the American Bandmaster's Association. He was an early Windjammer conductor starting in the 1970's and continuing through the early 1990's until his health forced him to quit.

I became acquainted with Keith around 1979. It wasn't until our Columbia Band was formed in 1981 that Keith and I really got together. I was playing a cornet solo with the band and Keith was in the audience. After the concert, Keith came over and said "Let's get together". From then on it became a life-long close friendship.

I had attended Central before Keith arrived and he invited me to come and play with the Central Alumni Band. He said "There is someone I want you to meet, but it might be a mistake." That person was Windjammer Bill Roosa. Roosa had sent some top notch players from his high school to Central. Keith was correct. During rehearsal, Bill and I did more joking than playing! Keith's alumni bands

were always fantastic. He would always invite a prominent guest conductor as well. Keith would pull out all of the stops when it came to the program. We would play war horses such as André Chénier, Chester, Egmont plus the various marches and a solo. We would rehearse about



Keith House & John Wetzel at a Windjammer Meet

3 hours in the morning, several more in the afternoon, and present the concert that night. I got to meet many of his students over the years including our current Vice President, Andy Glover.

Two of Keith's favorite foods were pizza and popcorn. The first time we went out for pizza together, we ordered two small separate pizzas as he liked weird stuff on his. When the pizzas arrived, he sprinkled his with crushed red pepper flakes and when I wasn't looking, gave me a dose also. I asked him why he had done that and he said "It will make your tongue faster"!

I had played trumpet most of my life, but I really didn't know much about the instrument until I met Keith. Trumpets, trumpeters, and music were mostly the subject of our conversations over the years. One of Keith's trumpet teachers was the great Rafael Mendez. Keith would tell stories about Mendez and his approach to trumpet playing. I always tried to soak up as much information as possible.

Keith died at his home in Fayette August 27, 2005. There were over 1000 in attendance at the funeral, a Phi Mu Alpha choir and 150 in the band. I was honored to play Taps at Keith's funeral. Of course I wanted to play it perfectly, but in the emotion of the moment, I cracked a note. A friend consoled me with the story of the bugler who played for JFK's funeral. His broken note was described as a sob.



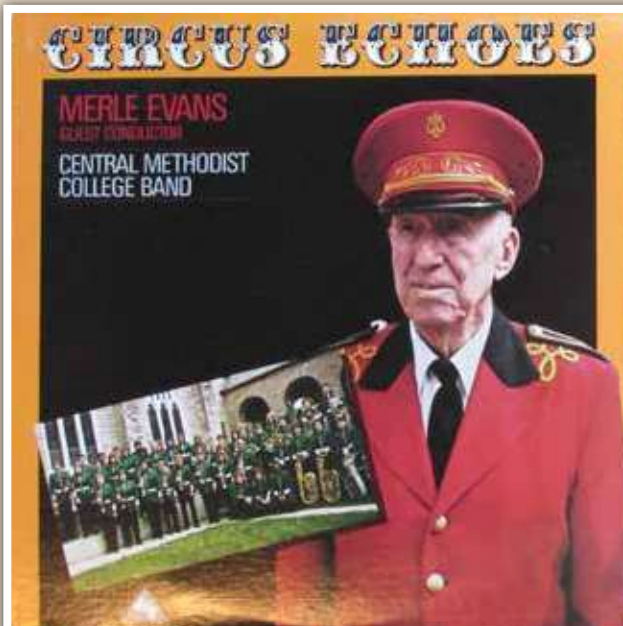
Keith House with Rafael Mendez

I miss him every day.

I could go on and on, but this is enough for now. In closing, I am listing just a few of my favorite

“Keithisms”:

- If you're on time, you're late.
- Never louder than lovely.
- Loud is softer than you think.
- Soft is softer than you think.
- Hit it hard and wish it well.
- This goes like a big bird (that means fast).
- With this piece of music, we are all Italians (French, etc).
- The key signature is your friend.
- Most intonation problems can be corrected with the right notes.
- Don't worry, it all depends on you (playing a solo passage, or solo).
- The melody must always be heard.
- All music has to swing.
- Don't quit one note too soon.
- A march is nothing more than a 3 minute tone poem.
- There is music in rests also.
- You have your problems and I have mine. (referring to the difficulty of playing the music.)



While Keith House was Director at Central Methodist College, he produced two LP's of circus music with Merle Evans as the Guest Conductor: **Circus Echoes** and **Circus Echoes Encore**. Tunes included were *Al G Barnes Grand Entree*, *Lassus Trombone*, *Wedding of the Winds*, *March of the Spanish Soldiery*, *Howdy Pap*, *Idaho*, *The Walking Frog*, *Light Calvary Overture*, *El Caballero*, *Ragged Rosy*, and *Exposition Four*; and *Barnum and Bailey's Favorite*, *Honey Boys on Parade*, *Atlantis*, *Go*, *Neel's Fashion Plate*, *Purple Carnival*, *CMC Triumphal*, *Napoli*, *Carrollton*, *Gallito*, and *Royal Degree*.